

# ZJER

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## **TOPIC: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CAUSES OF PRIMARY SCHOOL DROPOUT IN AN URBAN AND COMMERCIAL FARM SETTING IN NORTON AREA.**

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### **Abstract**

*This study sought to compare the causes of school dropout in a commercial farm setting and an urban setting. The sample for the study consisted of forty teachers (twenty from each setting) drawn from two urban schools and three commercial farm schools, twenty parents/ caregivers (ten from each setting), forty pupils (twenty from each setting), ten primary school dropouts (five from each setting) and five school heads of the five schools in the sample, all drawn from an urban and commercial farm setting. Forty questionnaires were administered to forty teachers and structured interviews conducted with the heads of the five schools, pupils primary school dropouts and parents / caregivers. The study found that there are similarities and differences in the causes of school dropout in the two settings. Whilst the causes might be similar, they tend to impact differently on the schools in both settings with schools in the commercial farm setting being the worst affected. Socio cultural factors such as chinamwari (female initiation) and nyau/gure (male dance sub cultural group) have a negative impact on retention rates in both settings though they tend to have a greater impact on children in a commercial farm setting. Although some schools in an urban setting are also negatively affected by, lack of adequate school facilities and poverty of parents schools in a commercial farm setting experience these factors to a greater extent. The current land reform programme appears to have negatively affected schools in the commercial farm setting more than those in an urban setting. The study recommends that government and non governmental organisations should assist in infrastructural development in commercial farm schools as they tend to have the poorest facilities in comparative terms. these A multicultural approach which would recognise the different linguistic backgrounds of children in both settings should be introduced and poverty alleviation strategies targeting commercial farm workers should be initiated since farm workers tend to experience the impact of poverty in more adverse ways.*

## INTRODUCTION

All countries particularly those in the Third World are faced with the problem of school dropout at primary and secondary school levels. The problem of school dropout poses a number of challenges to developing countries striving to attain Education For All (Peresuh and Nhundu, 1998 :67). One of the goals stated in the Dakar Framework Of Action in 2000 is to ensure that by 2015 all children complete primary education that is free, compulsory and of good quality ( Little,2002:13; Singh,2003 :16 ). The goal was adopted as one of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 (Unesco, 2002:30; Unicef, 2006:2 ) and Zimbabwe is working towards the attainment of this goal (Zimbabwe Government, 2004 :23; Unicef, 2006 :2). Watkins (2000 :87 ) argues that high dropout rates undermine the potential benefits of high enrolment rates especially where dropouts occur during the early school years. This represents wastage of scarce resources.

## CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

A number of definitions for the term 'drop out' have been suggested. According to Le Compte and Dworkin (1991: 79) a 'drop out' is any pupil of any age who leaves school for any reason other than death, before graduation or completion of a programme of studies and without transferring to another elementary school. Colcough and Hallack in Taylor and Mulhall (1997: 9) define a dropout as those that leave the school at any time other than the established exit points. These definitions seem to emphasize that a drop out is any pupil who leaves school without completing a cycle.

The issue of school dropout is a serious problem in sub-Saharan Africa with one in five children not reaching grade four (Taylor and Mulhall, 1997:9). This means that most of the drop outs do not reach grade five and may relapse into illiteracy (Unesco, 2002:47). Survival rates to grade five in sub Saharan Africa are lower than elsewhere (Unesco 2003:59; Watkins, 2000:87). In Zimbabwe school drop out is a serious problem as both boys and girls continue to drop out in each grade with more girls dropping out in both commercial farms and urban areas. Harbinson and Hanushek (1992:19) argue that the older the child the greater the potential labour contribution and the more likely it is for the child to drop out, that means that in each subsequent grade in primary school the higher the drop out rate. This leads to a situation where the child may drop out of school to seek employment particularly in the commercial

farms where child labour is a common occurrence. In Zimbabwe primary school completion rate has been declining from 82,6% in mid 1990s, to 76,1% by 1995 and further to 75% by 2000 (Zimbabwe Government, 2004 :24).

This study adopts a Marxist and neo-Marxist view on the causes of primary school dropout in primary schools. The socio economic status of the parents determines the retention rates of children in the education system. Farm workers, unlike their urban counterparts, generally lack sufficient financial and material resources to meet the demands of the education of their children. Poverty affects access and retention rates in education ( Unicef,2003 :33; Caillods and Poisson,2005:8; Zimbabwe Government, 2004 :24; Unicef, 2006 :19; Watkins,2000 :87). The causes of school drop out can be broadly grouped into two categories that are school based factors and home based factors.

## **SCHOOLBASED FACTORS**

The content of the school curriculum is an issue that needs to be considered. Schools have been described as middle class institutions that disseminate middle class culture. This situation disadvantages children who come from a working class background due to lack of 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu in Apple (1972:32) and linguistic competencies associated with a middle class background (Bernstein in Giddens, 2001: 510). As a result the curriculum lacks relevance to situations familiar with students (Taylor and Mulhall, 1997:20). This may result in underachievement which may lead to school dropout and ultimately result in social and cultural reproduction.

Classroom interaction plays an important part in maintaining retention rates. Becker (1989 :107 ) contends that those in service occupations conduct their business in terms of the 'ideal' client. It has been argued that for teachers the 'ideal' pupil has middle class characteristics

(Hargreaves in Sarup, 1978:43; Delamont,1983: 67). The concept of the 'ideal' client leads to labelling which influences teacher pupil interaction and achievement resulting in the self fulfilling prophecy which may contribute to dropping out. The pedagogy used by the teacher may not adequately address the classroom's multicultural character. Ekanayake in (Taylor and Mulhall (1997 :19 ) argues that teachers are unable to comprehend the irrelevance of the content and methods as the main causes of failure, high drop out rates and no participation of students.

The provisions of adequate school facilities (furniture and textbooks) as well as the physical state of the classroom are factors that influence retention rates. If there are no sufficient school facilities provided the drop out rate is likely to increase (Harbinson and Hanushek, 1992:33; Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1991:209). Communities in sub Saharan Africa have difficulty in sustaining their schools in qualitative and quantitative terms (Unicef, 2002 :47 ) Long distance to school is an issue that has to be considered as it contributes to dropping out( Caillods, 2005 :1; El-Hadji Amadou, 2005 :6).

## **HOME BASED FACTORS**

The socio-economic status of the family determines the retention rates in the education system. The child's labour may be required to supplement family income in which case families may withdraw children from school because they are needed to work (Watkins, 2000:89 ; Unicef, 2006:19 ). This issue assumes a gender dimension with more girls likely to drop out of school (Nyagura and Mupawaenda, 1994: 24 ; Unicef,2003:33). Poverty and hunger particularly in rural areas and disadvantaged communities contributes to erratic school attendance and drop outs (Zimbabwe Government, 2004:25). Ethnicity is another issue which influences academic achievement by transmitting certain ideas attitudes that bear on academic ability (Datta,1984 :153). Certain cultural practises such as female initiation ceremonies and male dance sub cultural groups for boys are related to school dropouts in some commercial farms. It should be noted that there are certain cultural practices which affect girls in particular (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1999:209).

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The research study sought to address the following research questions:

- (a) What are the causes of school drop out in a commercial farm setting and urban setting?
- (b) At which stage of primary schooling do most drop outs occur and why?
- (c) How has the land reform programme affected retention rates?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The research methodology adopted for this study was a qualitative research design. Qualitative research design stresses a

phenomenological model in which reality is rooted in the perceptions of the subjects (McMillan 1996:14). The design emphasises natural settings, understanding verbal narratives and flexible settings (Bogdan and Bilken, 1992:29; Borg, Gall and Gall, 1993:194).

## **DATA GATHERING INSTRUMENTS**

Data gathering instruments consisted of a questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire consisted of thirteen questions. Apart from giving 'yes' and 'no' responses the questions required respondents to give reasons for their answers, thus emphasising the qualitative research design. Questions 1 to 5 and 13 elicited information on classroom based factors while questions 7 and 8 elicited information on home based factors. Questions 9 to 11 elicited information on school based factors. Question 12 sought to elicit data on the impact of the land reform programme on retention rates. Forty questionnaires were administered to forty teachers drawn from two urban schools and three commercial farm schools. Structured interviews were conducted with the school heads of the five schools, pupils, school dropouts and parents in both settings.

## **POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

The population consisted of parents/ care givers, teachers, school dropouts, pupils and five school heads from an urban and commercial farm setting. From the population a sample of forty teachers (20 urban and 20 commercial farm schools) forty pupils ( 20 urban and 20 commercial farm schools), twenty parents ( 10 urban and 10 commercial farm schools) and ten primary school drop outs( 5 urban and 5 commercial farm schools) was selected using random and stratified systematic random sampling techniques. All heads of the five schools were part of the sample.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

Data from this study were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively though the main thrust was on the former. The responses of the teachers school heads, parents and pupils were compiled and analysed to look for themes related to the research problems.



**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: SCHOOL HEADS, PUPILS AND PARENTS INTERVIEWS, AND TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRES.****Drop out Statistics**

Data obtained from schools in both settings showed that the number of school drop outs recorded for the last three years was higher in the commercial farm setting than in the urban setting. In the schools in an urban setting detailed statistics were not readily available though one school head acknowledged that school dropouts do occur. In the urban schools one girl had dropped out due to pregnancy .Some of the school heads typical responses on the issue included:

- Clean up operation has resulted in large withdrawals from school that are difficult to categorise as dropouts.
- Parents change residence and even when the children drop out parents do not indicate withdrawal they just say they are changing residence.

This was contradicted by statistics from urban teachers' questionnaires which showed that a total of fifteen pupils ( eight male and seven female) had dropped out in 2006.

In the commercial farm setting two schools did not provide detailed statistics. One school head in the commercial farm setting provided statistics that showed that in 2003 four female students and two male students dropped out and in 2007 one male pupil dropped out. In his view the dropouts were due to the following reasons:

- The high numbers recorded in 2003 were the result of movement of parents following the take over of some farms.

This was supported by information obtained from teachers which showed that 53 pupils ( 25 male and 28 female) had dropped out in 2007. Some of the reasons given for dropping out by teachers were that:

- They have relocated to neighbouring farms so they cannot travel the distance to school.
- Attitude of parents towards school in farm areas is negative as they consider working in farms as their first priority.

At the other school the school head said that generally five pupils drop out annually with more girls dropping out. These statistics show that the issue of school drop outs exists and the issue takes a gender dimension

with more girls than boys dropping out (Nyagura and Mupawaenda, 1994:24; Unicef, 2003: 33).

### Grades mostly Affected

It was found out that in both settings grades three to seven are mostly affected by dropping out and this threatens survival rate into grade five (Unesco, 2003: 59).

In the urban setting one school head indicated that grades five and six were the ones mostly affected. He gave the following response:

- Certain socio cultural factors for example *nyau* (male dance sub cultural group) dancing affects retention rates.

Parents in an urban setting held similar views as they felt that dropouts could occur in grades 5,6 and 7. The other school head in an urban setting felt that it was difficult to identify specific affected grades as shown by her response:

- It is difficult to particularise in an urban setting where the socio economic status of the breadwinner could affect a child in any grade.

In the commercial farm setting the school heads felt that grades four to seven were generally affected. Some of their typical responses included the following:

- Pupils in grades three to five are used to supplementing family income where the children may not be formally employed by the farmer but could assist their parents in their work assignments.
- Parents sometimes lack income. The emphasis is on literacy hence dropping out after literacy has been gained.

This was supported by information from the interview of parents in the commercial farm setting which said that most of the affected pupils were from grades three upwards.

This seems to emphasise that poverty is a factor fuelling drop out rates ( Unicef, 2003: 19; Caillods and Poisson, 2005: 8 ; Zimbabwe Government, 2004: 24 ; Unicef, 2006: 19; Watkins, 2000: 87 ). The age of the child is a factor determining retention rates in the education system ( Harbinson and Hannushek, 1992 : 19 ).

### Factors that Contribute to Dropping Out.

What emerged from the study was that factors that contribute to school dropout are multidimensional and specific to certain situations. In the urban setting some of the following factors were highlighted by school heads:

- Economic factors where parents are unable to cater for every child due to higher fees.
- Orphanhood due to HIV/AIDS pandemic necessitating that children change residence and move to rural areas.

Parents in the urban setting expressed similar sentiments and some of their responses included the following:

- The state of the economy puts too much pressure on parents to sustain a decent life for children, more money is channelled towards food items.
- Poverty is worsening so that the employed person who waits for thirty days to get remuneration is worse off compared to the unemployed.

In the commercial farm setting the following were some of the responses of school heads:

- Sub cultural practices such as *nyau* is emphasised at the expense of education the child may withdraw from school to take part in these dances..
- Low income, farm wages are very low they were Z\$ 4 500 in December 2006 and are currently Z\$32 500 in June 2007 which results in inadequate finance.
- The issue of dropouts is influenced and fuelled by the pattern of farm life which is characterised by high labour force mobility particularly after the land reform programme.

These views were reinforced by the sentiments expressed by parents in the commercial farm setting which included the following:

- Parental income is spent on food items.
- School age children go out and work as a result of poverty. Parent says 'If the child buys soap I will buy mealie meal'.

School dropouts in the commercial farm setting held similar views. Some of their responses included the following:

- There is lack of financial resources to meet the demands of school.
- Other children supplement family income through working.

Poverty appears to affect children in both settings but in the commercial farm setting the impact of poverty appears to be more severe. Socio cultural practices and high labour force mobility affects pupils in the commercial farm setting to a greater extent.

### **GENDER AND DROPPING OUT**

The majority of teachers in both settings (seventy five percent) felt that the girl child is more vulnerable to dropping out. Some of the typical responses from teachers in the urban setting included:

- The belief is that the boy child will look after the family and the girl child will get married.

Parents in the urban setting expressed similar sentiments. Some of their responses included the following:

- There is a negative parental attitude towards the education of the girl child.

In the commercial farm setting some of the teachers' responses included the following:

- Rushing for early marriage.
- The home environment perceives it as a waste of time to educate the girl child.

In the commercial farm setting some of the parents responses were:

- Girls face the problem of early marriage.
- Girls could supplement the family income through working as domestic workers.

Whilst the girl child in both settings is likely to drop out, in the commercial farm setting certain cultural beliefs and practises may force the girl child to drop out (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall 1991 :209).

## **SCHOOLBASED FACTORS**

### **PROVISION OF SCHOOL FACILITIES**

It was found out that in comparative terms urban schools have better facilities than schools in the commercial farm setting and this affects retention rates in the latter setting.

In the urban setting the school heads felt that the provision of school facilities and learning resources was adequate. Teachers expressed similar views where eighty percent of the teachers in the urban setting felt that the provision of facilities was adequate. Some of their typical responses were:

- Children learn under a roof.
- There are adequate teachers and enough resources for children and teachers to use.

In the commercial farm setting the provision of school facilities and learning resources presents some problems as shown by some of the school heads responses:

- Classroom accommodation is adequate but, there is a shortage of reading materials.
- Teacher accommodation is unavailable, which results in apathy and affects children negatively.
- Co curricular activities do not cater for all and, thus those left out are demotivated and at times drop out.

Sixty percent of the teachers in the commercial farm setting felt that facilities were inadequate. Some of their typical responses were:

- Lack of adequate resources discourages children from attending lessons.
- The classrooms are not conducive learning environments. They have cracked walls which are homes for snakes, and the few benches are not even comfortable.

All the parents in the commercial farm sector felt that facilities were inadequate. Some of their responses included the following:

- Books are in short supply at school.
- There are water problems since the borehole broke down.

- Teachers come late to school because there is no accommodation for them.

Schools in the commercial farm setting are to a greater extent affected negatively by the lack of adequate infrastructure, facilities and resources which affect the drop out rate (Harbinson and Hanushek, 1992 :12 ; Psacharopoulos and Woodhall,1991:211 ; Unicef, 2002 :47 ; Unesco,2004 :47 ; Zimbabwe Government,2004 :24).

### **TEACHER ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS**

The majority of teachers in both settings ( sixty five percent in the urban setting and seventy percent in the commercial farm setting) felt that teacher attitudes and expectations affect retention rates. Teachers in the urban setting expressed some of the following views:

- If the child is stigmatised his or her self esteem is affected negatively and this may result in dropping out.
- The child may be affected by being labelled dull.

School heads in the urban setting were of a similar opinion. Some of their responses included the following:

- Teachers show an interest in pupils of high ability not social class.
- General perception of girls is poor despite awareness of gender sensitivity.

Teachers in the commercial farm setting gave some of the following responses:

- If the teacher expects standards that are high this often frustrates the learner.
- Fear affects pupils' education.

School heads in the commercial farm setting expressed similar views. Some of their responses included:

- Most teachers regard the child in a farming community as a sub child in terms of background and culture.
- Teachers tend to favour those from better off homes.

School pupils and school dropouts in both settings were of a similar opinion. Some of their responses included the following:

- Excessive corporal punishment is an issue. When a report is made to parents the child may withdraw.
- Favouritism where the child is constantly punished is an issue.

Teacher attitudes and expectations lead to a situation where some children tend to get preferential treatment in the school. These views emphasise that teachers tend to operate on the basis of the ideal client (Becker, 1989:107). Pupils in the commercial farm setting due to their low socio economic status tend to be greatly disadvantaged.

## **CURRICULUM ISSUES AND RETENTION RATES**

The majority of school heads in both settings (eighty percent) felt that the content of the curriculum is not relevant to children's needs particularly in a commercial farm setting.

Some of their responses included the following:

- Content is irrelevant to the child's needs content does not enable the child to identify with it and this affects motivation.
- There is no equity, the curriculum attempts to develop a different personality in the child, it seeks to make the child a different person from what s/he currently is.
- In school they are taught Shona which is not their L1 they are taught in a foreign language (s) inculcating Shona culture into them the pupils and parents are afraid of assimilation.

Thirty five percent of the teachers in the commercial farm setting expressed similar sentiments. Some of their responses included:

- The curriculum is mainly academic with little on self reliance or vocational or p training.
- There is a language barrier between the curriculum and the learner.

One school head in the urban setting felt that the curriculum content was relevant as shown by his response:

- Many children were born here they have adopted Shona so the curriculum content is relevant.

Pupils in a commercial farm setting are faced with the problem of a school curriculum that does not reflect their experiences and aspirations.

As such the curriculum lacks relevance ( Taylor and Mulhall 1997: 20; Ekanayake in Taylor and Mullhall, 1997:19).

## **HOME BASED FACTORS**

### **HOME ENVIRONMENT AND DROPPING OUT**

All the teachers in both settings felt that the home environment contributes to dropping out. Some of the typical responses from teachers in the urban setting were:

- Because the home environment makes the child have a negative attitude towards school work, the child may develop a negative attitude.
- Lack of encouragement, incentives, food shortage affects retention.

Parents in the urban setting were of a similar opinion and some of their responses included the following:

- Supplementing family income through vending could expose the child to money resulting in the child losing interest in school..
- Abuse in the home.

Teachers in the commercial farm setting highlighted some of the following issues:

- This has an impact on children's education because they are not exposed to a variety of people to imitate with good jobs. For example, in farm schools, pupils are only motivated by their parents' jobs, that is, to become potential farm workers.
- Their socio economic environment and status forces them to drop out of school so that they give a chance to younger siblings to get the education they attained.

Parents in the commercial farm setting gave some of the following responses:

- Lack of adequate food since a child should go to school after eating porridge.
- Assisting parents in their work tasks and assignments leads to a situation where the child is withdrawn from school.



To a greater extent a farm environment and lack of adequate financial resources affects retention rates in farm schools. The socio economic status of the child affects retention rates ( Zimbabwe Government, 2004 :24 ).

### 9.6.2 SOCIO CULTURAL FACTORS AND DROPPING OUT

The majority of teachers in both settings (seventy five percent urban setting and seventy percent commercial farm setting) felt that certain socio cultural factors affect retention rates in both settings though the child in the commercial farm setting is affected by some socio cultural practices that are compulsory.. Some of the responses of teachers in the urban setting were:

- Some drop out due to religious reasons.
- Some cultures do not value education and they believe in the hands on approach. They do not stress the on pursuit of education.

The majority of parents in the urban setting expressed similar sentiments. Some of their responses included the following:

- Religious views of certain families emphasise attainment at certain levels.
- *Nyau* and *chinamwari* ( socio cultural practices for boys and girls respectively ) affects children to a certain extent.

Some of the typical responses of teachers in the commercial farm setting included:

- *Nyau / gure* affects pupils because they are forced to play the dance.
- *The chinamwari* ( female initiation) issue is affecting the girl child whereby she has to be away from school for a whole month only to come back adult minded and difficult to work with.

Parents in the commercial farm setting held similar views. Some of their responses included the following:

- *Nyau* and *chinamwari* lead to the withdrawal of large numbers of pupils from school.

In this set up pupils in a commercial farm setting are by and large negatively affected by certain sub cultural practices which are compulsory. Ethnicity has a bearing on retention rates (Datta, 1984:153).

### **VULNERABILITY TO DROPPING OUT**

All the heads in the commercial farm setting and one in an urban setting felt that the child in the commercial farm setting is more vulnerable to dropping out. Some of their responses included the following:

- The low socio economic status of the parents.
- Poverty: the parents appreciate the little that the child earns which may not benefit the child.
- There is no strong base for education. There is lack of parental encouragement in education.

Parents in both settings held similar views. Some of their responses included:

- Distance to school is usually great.
- Urban parents have wider sources of income compared to parents in a commercial farm setting.
- Lack of commitment by parents.

Although poverty affects children in both settings negatively, the child in the commercial farm setting is compelled to drop out and supplement family income through working.

These issues tend to emphasise the view that these two settings are not homogenous groups as there are certain unique factors that affect retention rates. The causes of school drop out in the two settings may be similar but their consequences are different. Poverty influences access and retention (Unicef 2003:33; Caillods and Poisson, 2005 :8 ; Zimbabwe Government,2004 :24; Unicef, 2006 :19 ; Watkins,2000 :87 ).

### **IMPACT OF THE LAND REFORM PROGRAMME**

The land reform programme has affected retention rates and enrolment patterns in both settings. The school heads in an urban setting felt that the land reform programme has affected retention rates in both settings though there were sentiments that commercial farm schools are more affected. In the commercial farm setting the majority of the school heads felt that the land reform programme has had a negative impact. Some of

their views included the following:

- Movement of parents due to farm take overs. All workers were not absorbed by the new owners or they could have been allocated land as beneficiaries.
- Most new farmers are urban based, so they employ few people which affects enrolment patterns.

Sixty five percent of teachers in both settings expressed similar views. Some of the typical responses included these:

- Some children went to settle with their parents where there are no schools.
- Most families were displaced, hence, most farm schools were affected.
- Displacement of farm workers has resulted in scores of pupils transferring to rural areas resulting in low enrolments.

One school head in the commercial farm setting felt that the land reform programme has had a positive effect as shown by her response:

- Land reform programme has, therefore seen increased enrolments as new farmers bring their children.

The land reform programme has generally affected enrolment patterns negatively in some schools in a commercial farm setting.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The research study makes the following recommendations:

- Schools need to improve on records management particularly those dealing with retention rates.
- Transfer procedures need improvement to enable schools to determine whether one has dropped out.
- The government through the Ministry Of Rural Housing and Amenities and other non governmental organisations should actively assist commercial farm schools to upgrade their infrastructure
- A multicultural curriculum which would recognise the linguistic backgrounds of these children should be considered.
- The government should consider extending poverty alleviation programmes to commercial farm communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study has shown that school dropouts in both an urban setting and a commercial farm setting are a result of a combination of factors that impact negatively on the child. Whilst these factors show similarities and *differences in the two settings*, the impact of these factors is felt more in a commercial farm setting. Schools in a commercial farm setting are to a larger extent affected by issues such as: socio cultural factors, socio economic status of the parent, provision of school facilities and learning resources.

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